



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

JAPANESE STORY-TELLING

ONE of the most popular forms of entertainment in Japan is story-telling. Less expensive than the regular theatre and the music hall, and older than either, it rivals the modern movies in its attraction for the multitude. To the simple and often illiterate folk of the nation it is what the novel, the magazine and the sensational newspaper are to the people of the West. None can appreciate good stories better than an audience of Japanese, all classes being accustomed to them from childhood. Among the educated, of course, reading and the regular theatre, as well as the cinematograph, have largely supplanted the *yoseba*, or amusement halls; but the latter form of passing an idle hour has by no means lost its spell for the commonalty.

In Japan the professional story-teller, or *hanashika*, is held in scarcely less esteem than the regular actor; and he displays a character and an art all his own. Remarkable to relate, one of the most popular and accomplished story-tellers of Tokyo is an Englishman, Mr. Ishii Black, whose father was the founder of the first newspaper in Japan. The boy, having been born and brought up in the country, speaks the language like a native; and, as a retailer of droll yarns in the vernacular, has few equals among the *hanashika*.

The *yose* halls of Japan represent probably the very oldest form of public entertainment known to civilized man. If there be any older, it is that of the

itinerant minstrel or raconteur, who recited or chanted the heroic tales of old; and which, in Japan, developed into the *yose* hall with its *hanashika*. From remotest times the *daimyo* of old Japan were accustomed to have their clowns and story-tellers, just as the great personages of Europe had; and the cities in time boasted their regular places for an audience to hear some national epic, ballad or funny story, something like the *cabaret* of Europe. There are still strolling minstrels and story-tellers in the rural districts of Japan, who readily find a wayside audience; while almost every temple has a troupe of its own; for the Japanese raconteur can as easily teach a dogma as point a moral.

The stories are of a great variety, but for the sake of convenience may be divided into *rakugo*, or funny stories, and *kodan*, or heroic tales. The manner of rendering is as varied as the nature of the tales themselves, and of the taste and talent of the artist. Some are declaimed with a solemn, persuasive oratory and fine histrionic effect; while others go through the piece like clowns or comedians, acting out every detail with amusing and often grotesque exaggeration. Those of a ballad nature are sung or chanted to the accompaniment of the *samisen*; or even a more primitive instrument. I have listened to some of these old tales, or epics, older than historic time, monotoned with a weird voice to the twang of the

bina, an instrument older than the shell of Jubal; and after two hours of it I have been glad to retire, leaving the audience to the enjoyment of a repetition of the entire tale as an encore. Yet I could not help but feel myself in the presence of the mother of human song: the origin of poetry itself. These *naniwabushi*, or song-stories, are not all of ancient lineage, some of them being based on modern events of social or historic interest. Often the entertainment is relieved by the introduction of *ayatsuri*, or marionettes, and sometimes by juggling performances.

The *yose* houses are advertised by a huge characteristic lantern, as well as posters giving the name of the actors and the themes to be treated. On entering, the ushers receive one's foot-gear, giving a wooden check in exchange; and the ticket, a solid small wooden block, costing from ten to thirty *sen*, entitles the holder to one space on the *tatami*, or mat-covered floor. There one can sit, squatting in any shape nature suggests, smoke and talk and listen from seven to ten o'clock. Usually the best part of the entertainment is reserved till near the close. Each artist, as soon as he finishes his piece, hurries off to another *yoseba* to repeat it; and so on till he has taken a fee from three or four houses of an evening. The omnipresent policeman keeps an eye on all that goes on, without which precaution, politics or indecency might protrude. The largest *yose* halls would not accommodate more than 300 persons, while the usual one has an audience of scarcely more than from 50 to 100. As the entertainment goes on it seldom fails to elicit remarks from the audience, to which the artists

concerned as frequently make fitting and witty rejoinders, for they are never slow at repartee, this being a test of their quality. This, of course, is never permitted in the regular theatre.

In Tokyo there are about 150 of these *yose* halls of various grades; and their busiest seasons are fall and winter. The *yose* actors are men of remarkable genius and temperament, and as actors, have ideals cherished no less earnestly than their more ambitious rivals of the regular theatre. In an interview recently with one of the leading *yose* actors of Tokyo, he laid much emphasis on the importance of an association for the improvement of the art of the storyteller; and went on to say that the fraternity was somewhat divided as to its merits and defects. Some held that a story should always end with a good joke; others that it was sufficient if there was a wealth of wit and humour in the tale itself. Actors like Encho despised overmuch mimicry and gesticulation, as not savoring of good art. This disciple of the great *yose* master went on to explain that the accomplished storyteller was able to make his hearers laugh or weep, smile or frown, merely by vocal inflection and expression. It is difficult to bring a Japanese audience to tears, he admitted, but there are *yose* actors who can do it. As for himself, he said, it was his rule to raise the tension of the audience to a high pitch, and then let them down gradually, till their emotions were aroused and set in movement. There was a trick of dropping the voice, to be commended, whereby the hearers were brought to a point of extreme attention, which if followed by an outburst of lung power, led usually to fine applause.

When the *yose* actor has worked his listeners up to a point where he can see waves of emotion rolling over them all about the room, his success is achieved.

Kosanji, another of the leading *yose* actors, remarked in an interview that the men of his art had their good days and their bad; and on the latter days the story was often a failure. "I have been an actor in the regular theatre," he said, "and I know that of the two forms of art, story-telling is the more difficult. The regular actor has the advantage of scenery and costume to arouse and maintain interest; the *yose* actor has to create interest by his own intrinsic merit and personality. And often the *hanashika* has to impersonate five or six characters in one story."

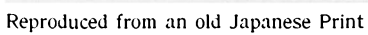
Apart from that of high achievement the reward of the *yose* actor is nothing sumptuous. He is paid at the rate of so much per head; the best getting no more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ *sen* for each person in the audience, the second man, 3; the third $2\frac{1}{2}$, and so on down to a mere fraction for the poorest on the programme, or for a beginner. It is said the most popular *yose* actor in Tokyo does not make more than 300 *yen* (\$150) (£30) a month, while the average is about 20 *yen* a month. The *yose* actor is often called in by noblemen and wealthy persons to entertain guests, when the fee is from 25 to 50 *yen*, according to the position and means of the patron.

The stories usually begin after the time-honoured formula; once upon a time, etc. The following are a few of the most popular heard in the *yose* halls of Tokyo.

"Once upon a time a certain dyer called in a blind masseur; and before

permitting him to begin operations, inquired his fee. The man replied: 'Two hundred *mon* (2d) for all, above and below.' The dyer expressed satisfaction and told the masseur to go ahead. When the dyer had enough, he called in his wife, and had her massaged also. Then he summoned his servants, both male and female, and had them all massaged. The poor blind massagist was delighted at his luck; but when the money was handed to him, lo, there was only 200 *mon*. Upon remonstrating that he should receive 200 *mon* for each person massaged, the dyer asked: 'Did you not say 200 *mon* for all, above and below?' (In the vernacular, "above and below" may also mean, master and servants). The masseur had to admit that he had said as much, and so went off with his small fee, without a murmur. He was determined to get even, however. He got hold of a friend of his and arranged with him to take a piece of cloth to the dyer, asking him to say to the latter: 'I want this cloth dyed in first-class style, without regard to price.' The dyer, glad to have so good an order, set to work and produced his best colour. The blind massagist came with the man to receive it; and taking up the parcel, walked off without offering any payment. When called back, with the demand as to what he meant by going off without paying for it, the masseur only replied: 'Did I not tell you when I ordered it that it was to be done without regard to cost?' (regardless of cost also meaning in the vernacular, without payment). Did you not agree to dye it without regard to price?'"

Another *yose* tale often heard is as follows: "It is said that in this world



there are eight kinds of fools, and the following are some examples. A farmer hearing a noise on the roof of his house one night, went out to discover the cause of it. There he saw his two sons perched on the house, one with a long bamboo pole, which he held aloft, pointing skyward with a sweeping motion. The old man could not make out what they were up to; then he heard the younger son remark to his brother: 'You can never knock down those little yellow things with that short pole; you must get a longer one; tie two bamboo poles together!' 'What are you two youngsters trying to do?' inquired the father at last. 'Why we are trying to knock down the stars,' explained the

older son. 'Go on, you stupid fellows,' shouted the old man, 'you will never knock those down, even if you had the longest pole on earth. Don't you know those are the holes through which the rain falls?'"

For very short stories the next is a good example: "A *samurai* was once walking along the street when he saw a sign to the following effect: Fencing and sword practice of all schools taught here! On going in to inquire, he was told that none of the household knew anything of fencing. Thereupon the officer demanded why they put out the sign. 'O,' replied one of them, 'that is only to frighten away robbers.'"

DR. J. INGRAM BRYAN, in the *Japan Magazine*.

THE NEW YEAR PINE

Atarashiki
Toshi no hogigoto
Kiku niwa ni
Yorodzu yo yobo-o
Noki no matsu kaze!

While New Year celebration fills my mind and heart,
I seem to hear above the palace eaves apart,
Winds calling midst the pines my garden doth adorn:
The voice of countless generations yet unborn!

MOONLIGHT ON THE SNOW

Kie nokoru
Matsu no kokage no
Shirayuki ni
Sasu kage samishi
Ariake no tsuki!

At dawn, how cold the waiting moon doth shine
On remnants of the snow beneath the pine!

By Meiji Tenno

Trans. by Mrs. Douglas Adam.